

Comment on EIS-FELA Strike Action

Talks aimed at averting the latest Educational Institute of Scotland Further Education Lecturers' Association (EIS-FELA) strikes have broken down without a resolution, leaving representatives for colleges exasperated at the repeated refusal of the EIS-FELA to engage in meaningful negotiations or offer to make any concessions in return for being offered yet more pay for lecturers.

This is the third time in four years that the EIS-FELA has gone on strike. They have been out on strike this year on Wednesday, 16 January and Tuesday, 5 February and have further strikes planned for Wednesday, 6 March, and Thursday, 21 March 2019.

Commenting on the EIS-FELA's non-negotiating tactics, John Gribben, Director of Employment Services at Colleges Scotland Employers' Association, said:

“Colleges have now made six improved pay offers to try and resolve the pay dispute and end the unnecessary EIS-FELA strikes, but, yet again, they have not accepted our latest offer, nor will they seek the views of their membership. While the EIS-FELA's intransigence is disappointing, it is not surprising, as they don't engage in meaningful negotiation and are not prepared to make any concessions in return for more money for already very well-paid lecturers.

“College lecturers have seen substantial pay rises from the harmonisation deal agreed in May 2017 and significant improvements to their terms and conditions, including 62 days' holiday a year, a reduction in class contact time to 23 hours per week, excellent pensions, and a commitment from colleges to pay for those lecturers without formal teaching qualifications to gain TQFEs within existing working hours.

“The pay harmonisation rises from 2017 to 2020, combined with the additional pay offer on the table from colleges, equates to a national average increase of over £5,000 but the EIS-FELA has rejected this as it is still not enough for them. This is the third time in four years that the EIS-FELA has gone out on strike and is regrettably now their default position. Lecturers in Scotland are by far the best paid across the UK.

“The EIS-FELA is demanding the same deal as colleges agreed with the support staff trade unions in October 2018, but they are cherry-picking the best parts of the deal and ignoring aspects they don't like, such as Job Evaluation. Colleges recently offered to extend the pay deal until September 2020 – the same as the support staff deal – which increased the financial envelope of the offer to £12.6 million, which more than meets in the middle the difference between the EIS-FELA pay demand of £14 million and colleges' previous offer costing £10.1 million.

“The EIS-FELA is balloting their members to escalate action short of strike action and has vowed to withhold assessment results from colleges, which would prevent students from graduating and progressing to other college or university courses. This is a gamble by the EIS-FELA designed to get the Scottish Government to intervene as they calculate that will get them more money, but they are recklessly gambling with students' futures.

“The Scottish Government has made it clear that there is no more money for lecturers' pay and colleges have to find this additional £12.6 million pay deal on offer by making cuts. If there were any more money available, our priorities would be for additional investment in enhancing students' experiences and on further improving college campuses, as £65.8 million is already being spent over three years on lecturers' pay and conditions.”

ENDS

Notes to Editor:

Outline of improved terms and conditions agreed for lecturing staff through National Bargaining:

On top of the 9% national average pay increase from harmonisation over the same three-year period, lecturers are also receiving annual leave increases to 62 days' holiday, a reduction in teaching hours to 23 hours weekly contact with students, salary conservation ensuring the retention for four years where a member of staff is currently in receipt of existing local salary conservation arrangements, paid provision of 150 hours remission time within existing paid hours for approximately 1,500 lecturers who don't have formal teaching qualifications to gain a TQFE, plus other terms and conditions either safeguarded or enhanced.

Comparison with Support Staff:

In October 2018, after negotiations and compromises by both sides, colleges reached agreement with the support staff trade unions (UNISON, Unite and GMB) and signed a two-and-a-half-year pay and conditions of service deal.

As part of that deal, support staff – who receive 45 days' annual leave compared to 62 for lecturers – will go through a job evaluation process to consider issues of pay equality and, while lecturers have harmonised pay, the EIS-FELA has repeatedly refused to agree to job evaluation for lecturers, or negotiate pay alongside support staff.

The overall investment in lecturing staff from 2017-2020 is £65.8m and the overall investment in support staff over the same period is estimated to be £37.1m

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